

Guelph Family Health Team launches strategy to address “community crisis” related to access to Psychiatry

Guelph Family Doctors are taking the lead on a community plan to recruit and fund 10 psychiatrists to help support patients in the Guelph-Puslinch area. *“I believe our community is in crisis”* says Dr. Will Ruddock, Board Chair of the Guelph Family Health Team. Ruddock adds - *“Guelph family doctors, nurse practitioners and other clinicians do their best daily to support local residents needing support with mental health and addictions. We need Community Psychiatry support with diagnostics, medication advice and ongoing care.”*

Over the past year, family physicians from the Guelph Family Health Team (Guelph FHT), the Guelph Community Health Centre (Guelph CHC) and Student Health Services at the University of Guelph have worked together to really understand the needs of our community. *“We’ve also worked hand-in-hand with CMHA, Stonehenge Therapeutic Community and other important community partners to learn about the real gaps in our system”* - said Dr. Doug Friars, a family physician and Director on the Guelph FHT Board – *“and we know that access to psychiatry is a huge gap in Guelph.”* In an initiative dubbed **Act as One Service**, local family doctors are collaborating with community mental health and addictions service providers to design a local solution to meet the needs of the Guelph-Puslinch community.

Leading experts in the field suggest a ratio of one community psychiatrist for every 10,000 citizens; locally, the ratio is approximately 1 to 30,000. Due to the psychiatry shortage, local residents often wait over a year for psychiatric diagnoses and treatment plans.

Raechelle Devereaux, Executive Director of the Guelph CHC, states *“When mental health and addictions issues are really complex, psychiatry assessment and consultation is needed to best support the individual’s health. When a client has to wait for these services for months on end, doctors and nurse practitioners are really challenged as they provide this care in the interim. The Guelph CHC certainly experiences the strain that is caused when we try to fill the gap left by the lack of community based psychiatry for our clients.”*

The Guelph FHT is seeking \$1.2 Million to develop a comprehensive and robust psychiatry support system in the Guelph-Puslinch area. This plan was fully endorsed at a recent meeting of family doctors in the Guelph area. With this funding, the plan is to recruit approximately 10 psychiatrists. The Guelph FHT will continue working with local community services, community leaders, the Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integration Network and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to find ways to make this happen.

Ross Kirkconnell, Executive Director of the Guelph FHT, notes *“we are sharing this today to coincide with **Bell Let’s Talk Day**”. Across Canada, **Bell Let’s Talk** has really helped break the silence around mental illness and addictions.”*

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